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A

# LETTER

To the CONGREGATION of

*Protestant Dissenters*

At HACKNEY,

Amongst whom the Author now stately  
MINISTERS.

WITH A

*P O S T S C R I P T*

To all others to whom he has formerly  
Preached.

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By *P H I L I P G I B B S.*

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The SECOND EDITION.

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LETTER

THE SECRETARY OF THE

BRITISH MUSEUM



POST OFFICE

To the Editor of the

BRITISH MUSEUM

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A  
L E T T E R

To the CONGREGATION of  
*Protestant Dissenters, &c.*

Dear S I R S,

 S the fixing me with you in a ministerial Capacity, was one of the more remarkable Events that has happen'd to me in the course of my Life: So 'tis what I do, and shall always reflect upon (I believe) with peculiar Satisfaction and Comfort. The Situation I am in is fully agreeable, and I never yet once repented of it, nor would I leave it for any other if I might. My self and Labours, when I was solemnly set apart to the Work of the Ministry, were willingly devoted to you, and amongst you shall they be cheerfully spent. Let me be but secured of your Affection, and

made instrumental to do your Souls good, by building you up on your most holy Faith, and improving you in all Virtue and Goodness, and I shan't be greatly solicitous as to any thing else.

But when I came to *Hackney*, Sirs, I had not made my *last* Understanding in Religious Matters: So far from it, that 'twas a considerable Inducement to me, to accept of an Invitation to come and settle here, that I should have more Leisure, and better Opportunities to *re-examine* these Matters than I had ever before enjoyed. Accordingly I set myself to study them afresh, especially such as are reckoned the principal and most important. And I have read the Authors who are esteemed to have writ best upon these, of both sides; but above all *search'd the Scriptures* relating to them, I hope with care, diligence, and impartiality, imploring at the same time *Divine teachings*, to be kept and deliver'd from Error, and led into the Truth. The result of this has been a *change* of Belief and Opinion about sundry points of Religion, and some that are reckon'd capital, or fundamental, not excepted; which change, as I am not willing any longer to conceal from you, so I could think of no way more proper than by thus writing to you to discover and make it known. And whilst I purpose that frankness and plain-dealing shall be used on my part, candour and charity will, I trust, not be wanting on yours.

To



To begin then with the Doctrine of the *Sacred Trinity* : I can no longer believe that this is stated orthodoxly, and agreeable to the Scriptures, either in the *first Article of the Church of England* ; or the *Sixth Answer of the Assembly's Catechism* ; and much less the *Creed of Athanasius* : The first of which says, That in the Unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of *one Substance, Power, and Eternity*, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The *second*, that there are three Persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these *three* are *one God, the same in Substance, equal in Power and Glory* : the *last*, That though there is *one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost*, yet the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is *all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal, &c.* For there are no such Propositions as these to be met with in Scripture. On the contrary, to us, says the Apostle, there is *one God*, viz. *the FATHER*, of whom are all things, and we for him ; even as there is to us *one Lord, Jesus Christ*, by whom are all things, and we by him, 1 Cor. viii. 6. So in another place 'tis asserted by St Paul, that there is one Spirit, one Lord, and one God, and Father of all, who is above all, thro' all, and in us all : *Ephes. iv. 5, 6, 7.* The Father is in some hundreds of places stiled God *absolutely*, and by way of eminence, and with peculiar high titles and epithets. And to make the Son and Spirit *Equal with him*, is inconsistent with the numerous

Texts

Texts which affirm them to be *both of them, of and from HIM*, and to act in all Things by his Mission, and Authority, and Will.

And the Doctrine of three *Persons*, that is to say, *Three distinct, intelligent, voluntary Agents*, each of them *Self-existent, Independent, and Supreme*, or having the *very same* Divine Essence, is no less irreconcilable to Reason than it is to Scripture, and carries too much the face and appearance of *Tritheism* in it ; nay I am not able, I own, to vindicate it from that charge, which sure is an Error of the grossest and most odious sort. And as such Doctrine can't be the object of my Belief, because it is manifestly repugnant to Scripture and Reason both : So I am the more against it, on account of its being strenuously espous'd by the *Papists* ; and what they, when pressed with the absurdities attending the monstrous doctrine of *Transubstantiation*, have immediate recourse to, and find the best refuge in. Besides, It has been, I am now persuaded, a grand obstacle to the spread of Christian Religion in the World ; will ever be a prejudice to the conversion of *Jews, Mahometans, and Heathens* ; has occasioned endless disputes and infinite uncharitableness amongst Professors of Christianity ; and, which is of no less weight with me than either of the former, it has produced abundance of ignorant, unmeaning, uncommanded Worship ; not only *direct Invocations* of the *Trinity*, and Prayers to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as *three in one, and one in three, one God in Trinity of Persons, &c.* But *Doxologies,*

*logies*, or Ascriptions of *equal* Honour and Glory to each of these three Persons ; whereas thro' the whole New Testament there does not appear either a Precept or Precedent of such a practice : Nay we are plainly taught here what is inconsistent with it, God *the Father* being represented as the most proper, constant, object of our addresses in worship. As for putting up prayers directly and expressly to the Person of the *Holy Spirit*, tho' there may *seem* to be Foundation for it in the œconomy of the Gospel, yet there cannot so much as one clear Command or Example of this be produced. Now I think that in nothing Christians ought to be more cautious of being wise above what is written, than in the affair of Religious Worship. And if we are not to *confine* ourselves altogether to the *Doxologies of Scripture*, 'tis *safest* however, keeping to *these*. And when Glory and Honour are at any time ascribed to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, I would be understood to mean such Glory and Honour as are respectively due to them for their distinct Powers, Offices, and Agencies in the Creation, Government, Redemption, Sanctification, and Salvation of Man. The ascribing the *same*, or *equal*, Glory to Father, Son, and Spirit ; adoring them as three Persons, and the one true and living Supreme God, or devoting and dedicating ourselves to them as such ; I can't help signifying my great dissatisfaction with, and 'tis what I do from this time enter a serious protest against,

Having

Having thus freely open'd myself, and told you my present Faith, with respect to the *Doctrine of the Trinity*, I shall next do the same as to the *Person of Christ*. And I do not believe him to be the *Complex* or *Compound* Being, which Creeds and Systems have generally represented, *viz.* made up of two *distinct* Natures, a *Divine* and *Humane*, the *Godhead* and *Manhood* united; so as to be *very* and *perfect* God (*equal to the Father*) and *very* and *perfect* Man; of a *reasonable* Soul and *humane* flesh *subsisting*. This, I am now convinc'd, is introducing an imaginary Christ, in the room of the real one. The Scripture frequently asserts him to be *of* and *from* the *Father*, his *begotten*, his *only begotten* Son, which alone, in my Opinion, is enough to disprove an *Equality* between him and the *Father*. And the Scripture makes no mention of a *complete humane* Nature; as assumed by this Son of God: Nor any *where* teaches that he became Man, *i. e.* by taking to himself a true Body and reasonable Soul. We are assured indeed by inspired Writers, that the *Divine Logos* became *Flesh*; that God sent forth his Son, in the fullness of time, made, or born of a *Woman*; that he took a *Body* prepared for him, was found in *fashion* as a *Man*, &c. which Expressions amount to no more than what has commonly been called the *Incarnation* of the Son of God, and don't import, I apprehend, his being united to a Man. And a *Conjunction* of two *intelligent* Natures in him, would be incompatible truly with a *unity of Person*; and  
to



to make such an account of Christ agree to a number of Texts in the New Testament, learned Men have thought themselves obliged to have recourse to certain precarious *Hypotheses*, as that of the *Pre-existence* of the *Humane Soul*, or the *Quiescence of the Divinity*, or both. Besides; the Glory of Christ's *Love* in his *Humiliation* and *Exinanition*, which the Apostle St Paul seems as if he knew not how sufficiently to extol and magnify, is, by the said account of his Person, sadly diminished, and notwithstanding the grand Representations hereof in the Epistles, it must and will, according to this account, dwindle into little, comparatively, of real Self-implying Love†. Yea, and farther, by this account, the minds of Christians have been very much perplexed in the great affair of Worship, since it supposes and requires Jesus Christ to be both *ultimate Object*, and *Mediator* at the *same time*, and in the *same acts*.

I will next declare to you my Faith upon the Head of the *Decrees of God*. And I no longer believe the Doctrine concerning these which teaches, that they are absolute Purposes or Resolves of the *Divine Will*, conversant about *all* futurities, and predetermining, or fore-ordaining *whatever comes* to pass. The Scripture, I am

† His Exinanition was not *Notional*, or such as needs the help of nice and subtle Distinctions, and the art of words, to make it something: but it was a real proper Exinanition. He actually laid aside, and parted with a Glory he had with the Father before the world was; tho' originally in the *form of God*, he emptied himself, and took upon him the form of a Servant. What manner of Love is this! Vid. Mr Bennet's *Christian Oratory*, p. 270, 271.

now satisfied, upon more thorough search into it, knows no such Doctrine. The Texts that are wont to be brought in support of it are greatly misunderstood. Such a Scheme of Decrees seems to approach very near the *Heathenish Destiny*, and *Fate*. For Events to be *universally* and *absolutely* predetermin'd by God, will hardly consist, I think, with his Moral Government of the World; and infer a *necessity* of Action subversive of Virtue or Religion: Makes God the Author of Sin, *decretively* at least, and to *fore-appoint* things which he *abhors* and *detests*; yea, and *prohibits* under the severest Penalties, the *wicked* and *criminal Deeds of Men*. And as I am free to own that I disbelieve a Predestination of *all* Events in *general*; so particularly of the *Future, Eternal, States and Conditions of Men*. That is to say, that the Divine Supreme Being having present to his view the whole Humane Race, and looking upon them either merely as *Creatures*, or moreover *lapsed and fallen in Adam*, *peremptorily and absolutely decreed the final Condition* of every one; chusing a certain number with a Resolution of making *them*, and *them only*, for ever happy; and passing by, yea, *reprobating* the rest, with a purpose of their becoming for ever miserable. This also appears now to me to be an unscriptural Doctrine. The Bible no where teaches such Decrees. On the contrary, I am persuaded they have been brought into Theology, for want of rightly understanding the Bible, particularly that noted Chapter, the eleventh to the *Romans*, which has been reckoned

reckoned their Seat. And I am against them the rather, because I look upon them to be no less hurtful and dangerous, than erroneous and false. The teaching of them has hitherto been, and always will be, *dishonourable to the blessed God, disserviceable to the Interest of Religion, and discouraging to all Piety and Virtue*. Especially as to *Reprobation*, unconditional and absolute, (which is stiffly held by such who would pass in the World for Divines of *superior Soundness and Orthodoxy*) what can be conceived more unworthy of God, or bring greater Reflexion upon his moral Character for Goodness and Justice; making him, tho' the *common Father of Mankind* to abandon and cast away such numbers of his Offspring, and this without the Consideration of their having done Good or Evil; or for no personal Crime and Guilt of theirs, but purely for the fault and transgression of another which they could not help. Can there be a more unamiable Representation of the best of Beings? And how sad a discouragement must it be to Persons using means and endeavours that they may be saved, to think of a secret latent Decree, whereby multitudes of Mankind, even the greatest part, are effectually precluded and debarred from all capacity of Salvation†.

I hence proceed to speak my mind concerning the Doctrine of *Original Sin*; by which, if we

† Learned Writers hold that there is an absolute Decree of Election proper to *some* only, and it is inconsistent with this to maintain, that all Men are *capable* of being saved. There is a contrary Decree, [The Decree of Damnation] that renders some of them wholly *incapable*. Vid. Edwards's *Veritas Redux*, p. 380, and 389.

are to understand the *first* Sin or Offence of *Adam*, imputed and charged by God to all his Posterity, I own it to be no longer an Article of my Faith, because there is a total silence in Scripture about it ; such an imputation of *Adam's* Sin, being affirm'd, that I can find in no one place. And indeed, it is impossible in the nature of Things for an Action done *solely* by *him*, to be *transferred* to *us*, and reckon'd the action of all his Descendants. But supposing it possible for *his* Crime and Guilt to be charged upon his *Posterity*, and made *theirs*, I am at a loss to reconcile this with Principles of Equity and Justice : Yea, the imputing to a whole Race a sinful fact done by another, before any of them were *born*, which consequently was quite out of *their* power to prevent ; which *they* must be entirely ignorant of, and no *ways accessory and consenting* to, seems manifestly unreasonable and unrighteous. Or if by *Original Sin* be meant, a *Moral Depravity*, and Corruption of Nature propagated from *Adam* to his Posterity, which all are born into the World with, and whereby they *are render'd Sinners* (properly so called) in the sight of God, and are *liable to Wrath and Damnation* ; I disbelieve this too, I confess, taking it to be a Doctrine as remote from Scripture, and irreconcilable with principles of Reason and Justice, as the former. And what moves me to declare more readily and strongly against Original Sin, of this kind, or in this sense, is, not only the plain tendency that it has to lessen *parental Affection* ; must cause Fathers and



and Mothers to entertain *wrong* notions of their Offspring, and consider them in a *bad* light; will be apt to *dishearten*, or *mislead* them, or both, in the important Business of their *Education*: But also, because it is wont to be matter of *Confession* to God in Prayer; is, with some, the sure Criterion of a thorough *penitential Abasement*, and real *Work of Grace* in their Souls. And then, there has sprung from hence another Doctrine, much taught and preach'd among us, and very strenuously contended for, *viz. Regeneration*, with its *absolute* and *universal Necessity*; which I don't now perceive to be the Doctrine of the New Testament. 'Tis at least *doubtful* with me; whether any are spoken of here as being regenerated and born again, or standing in need to be so, except such as *at first were not of the Christian Religion, but either Jews or Heathens*. In proportion indeed to Mens *degeneracy* from Goodness, and *corrupting themselves*, whether in Temper or Practice, and *only* in proportion hereunto, must their want of *change*, and *renovation* be estimated. And some may grow so bad and vicious, I acknowledge, as to need to be quite alter'd, and in a manner made *new Creatures*. But to insist that there is a necessity of Renovation for *all* Mankind, and for all *equally* and *alike*, that (because of the pre-supposed Original Sin) this is wanted by Persons educated in *Christianity*, just as by *Heathens*; by *Children*, as well as the *Adult*; yea by those who have had the advantage of a most Religious Education, and, for ought appears, have preserved

served their *Innocence*, no less than others, is what I can't agree to; 'tis in my present Opinion contrary to Reason and Scripture both.

This leads me on to declare my Sentiments upon another head, or point of Divinity, namely, that of *Man's Moral Impotence*, as it is term'd, or the *Disability* we are *all* affirm'd to labour under for performing actions truly Good and Religious in consequence of *Adam's Sin and Fall*. And though I willingly allow this in *certain Degrees*, yet I don't take it to be *universally total and absolute*; according to the representation that some Divines have given of it: Or, in plain terms, that we are all of us as wholly void of Capacity for *right moral Actions*, as Creatures dead, or Beings inanimate, are for what is *natural*. Nay, how great soever this may be in any, it is ballanced, I believe, by the undertaking of our Saviour Christ, and a sufficient *Remedy*, for it is provided (at least where the Gospel is preach'd); so that *Impossibilities* are not required of us by God, nor does he enjoin things but what are brought *some way* within our *own Power*; especially things that he has laid our *Salvation* upon. Affirming the *contrary* is, in my Opinion, injurious to the *moral Character* of our heavenly Father, and highly asperfes both his Justice and Goodness. I don't see, upon supposition, the *contrary* were true, how he could *appeal* to Men, as he does in his Word, for the *Righteousness* of his Proceedings, and the *Equity* of his *Ways*. We hereby make him that hard Master, who *reaps where he has not sown*,  
and

and *gathers where he had not strewed*. Whatever weakness and impotence we are under by reason of the Fall, none shall perish (I believe) except thro' their own *Default*; an assisting influence needful for the purposes of Religion, even that of the Spirit of God, being promised and ready to be vouchsafed to all, and every Man by whom it is sincerely desir'd and ask'd; for if earthly Parents know how to give, &c. *Luke xi. 13*. Nor must it be pleaded that we want ability thus to ask it; for doubtless (as one says) † We are capable of such asking, as is pointed out to us, and made the condition of receiving; otherwise here were a Promise, and no Promise, a Promise to mock us, and not to encourage us. And I would oppose the contrary Doctrine with greater warmth of Zeal, not only because it appears to be false and *unworthy* of God; but because of the evident *bad tendency* of it too. It *has* done, I am satisfied, and *must* do wherever it prevails, a great deal of hurt and mischief to People. What more likely to discourage Men from entering upon a Religious Course, or hinder them from setting about the practice of their Duty, than to be told they are become quite dead to this, that all their power and ability for it was by the Fall lost and gone; and there is no *relief* provided in *Divine Aids*,  
or

† Worthy Mr *Bennet* in his useful Book of the *Christian Oratory, or Devotion of the Closet displayed*, p. 375.

or *help* from *above*, whereupon they can warrantably and with assurance depend †.

† The excellent Archbishop *Tillotson*, in a Sermon of his concerning the nature and necessity of Holy Resolution, has so well expressed what I would say upon this Head, that I beg leave to transcribe the Passage. ‘ Can any thing (says he) be more vain  
 ‘ than to go about to persuade Men to do what they cannot do.  
 ‘ To intreat them to attempt an Impossibility; and to urge and  
 ‘ solicit them with all earnestness, to do that which is absolutely  
 ‘ and altogether out of their power? All the Commands of God  
 ‘ and Exhortations of his Word, and all the promises and threatenings whereby those Exhortations and Commands are enforced,  
 ‘ do plainly suppose either that it is in our power to do the thing  
 ‘ which God commands and exhorts us to, or else if it be not (as I  
 ‘ grant it is not) that God is ready by his Grace and Strength, if  
 ‘ we be not wanting to ourselves, to assist and enable us to those  
 ‘ Ends and Purposes. For the Gospel supposeth a Power going  
 ‘ along with it, and that the Holy Spirit works upon the Minds  
 ‘ of Men, to quicken, and excite, and assist them to their Duty.  
 ‘ And if it were not so, the Exhortations of Preachers would be  
 ‘ nothing else but a cruel and bitter mocking of Sinners, and an  
 ‘ ironical insulting over the Misery and Weakness of poor Creatures; and for Ministers to preach, and People to hear Sermons  
 ‘ upon other terms, would be the vainest expence of Time, and  
 ‘ the idlest thing we do all the Week; and all our Dissuaves  
 ‘ from Sin, and Exhortations to Holiness and a good Life, and  
 ‘ vehement Persuasions of Men to get to Heaven, and escape Hell,  
 ‘ would be just as if one should urge a blind Man, by many Reasons and Arguments taken from the advantages of Light, or  
 ‘ Comforts of Sense, and the beauty of external Objects, by all  
 ‘ means to open his Eyes, to behold the Delights of Nature, to  
 ‘ see his Way, look to his Steps;’ [I will take the liberty to insert] or a dead Man to quicken and raise himself, to get upon his Feet, and perform all the Labours and Businesses of Life] and should upbraid him, and be very angry with him for not doing so. Vol. III. p. 71. In another Sermon of the Nature of Regeneration, and its necessity in order to Justification and Salvation, the same Writer observes, ‘ That it is the greatest and justest Discouragement in the World to all endeavours of Repentance and Reformation, to tell Men that they are passive, and can do *nothing*  
 ‘ in it. He that is sure of this, that he can do nothing in this  
 ‘ Work, is a Fool if he make any attempt to become better, because he struggles with an Impossibility; and if the Work will be  
 ‘ done at all, it will be done without him, and he neither can nor  
 ‘ ought to have any hand in it. Vol. II. p. 375.

Another



Another Point that I would speak freely to (which it may be would have come better before) is the *extent* of God's redeeming *Designs*, and of the *beneficial influence of Christ's Undertaking and Death*. And I don't believe that these are, or ought to be, restrained, to a *few of Mankind*, or a certain number *only*, who are commonly understood by the *Elect*; but that they reach to Mankind considered at large; to People of *every Nation and Kindred, Tongue and Tribe*, particularly all such who enjoy the Gospel; so far as to restore them to a *Capacity of Salvation*, and to make the Attainment of future Blessedness *possible* to them, in case their *own wilful refusal* to comply with the Terms upon which this is offered, does not prevent.

As such an universal Redemption is greatly to be *desired* by us, so the Scriptures teach it in the *plainest* manner, and *strongest* terms; nor is there hardly any other point of Christian Doctrine for which more *ample* Testimonies of the Word of God are to be alledged. And I have, I must own, a peculiar dislike to the *contrary* Doctrine upon several accounts; because it is highly uncomfortable and discouraging; has divers Consequences *necessarily* flowing from it very erroneous and frightful; it derogates mightily from the *Grace of God*; diminishes the *Love of the Blessed Jesus*; and deprives Ministers of a *grand Topic* they have to insist upon (in my Opinion indeed, one of the *best* Topics) in order to prevail with Sinners to repent, to forsake their evil

C

Courses,

Courses, apply themselves to the Business of Religion, and work out their own Salvation.

There is one Point or Article more still remaining, about which I chuse to declare my Mind freely, as I have done with respect to each of the former, and that is the important Point of *sinful Man's Justification*. And it evidently appears to me now, that somewhat *besides*, nay, and *contrary* to the *Scripture Doctrine* concerning this, has, for Years past, been advanced and taught amongst us; particularly by such as hold that the Essence of it lies in Persons being *made, or constituted, just and righteous by and with the Righteousness of another, viz. the Mediatorial Righteousness*, (as they call it) of *Jesus Christ*, consisting of his *active and passive Obedience*; yea, and the *created habitual Holiness of his humane Nature*, which Righteousness is graciously *imputed and given* to Believers by God, and they *apprehend or receive* meerly by Faith. One might reasonably expect sure to meet with this account of Justification (supposing it true) somewhere or other in Sacred Writ: to have had the Righteousness of Christ *thus characteriz'd*, and the *Imputation* of it *expressly and positively affirm'd*. But I can't find it to be so now, I own, in any single place. And the Scripture is *free* from the *Language* used by our Divines, when treating of Justification, agreeable to the Notion of it as before stated: *ex. gr.* God's *vesting, and clothing us* with the Righteousness of his Son, *making it over to us, reckoning and reputed* it *ours, transferring* of it, and *placing it to our Account*. So,  
Faith's

Faith's *looking to*, and *apprehending* the said Righteousness, *receiving, embracing, putting it on, applying it, &c.* And it is no wonder to me, that *such Phraseologies*, and Modes of Speech, occur not in *Scripture*, particularly the Writings of *St Paul*, or the *other Apostles*, when I consider, that they are very wide of the *Nature and Truth of Things*. Christ's Righteousness, let it consist of what it will, Obedience *active*, or *passive*, or *both*, can't be *transferred* to others (the Righteousness *itself* I mean, cannot) so as to become *theirs*, and the *immediate Matter* of Justification to them. It is no more *thus transferrable or imputable* than *Adam's Sin*. Both are personal Things, and can't be transpos'd from one to another. They do and must, necessarily *inhere* in their *respective* Subjects always. I may reap, 'tis true, the *Benefit* and Advantage of what another Person *does* and *suffers*: but his Doings and Sufferings *themselves* will eternally remain *his*, and can never be accounted *mine*. And, in plain Words, I take the Foundation of such an Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ to be chimerical and imaginary, *viz.* Christ's being appointed from everlasting a *fæderal Head* to the *elect People*, *exclusively* of the rest; Covenanting with God his Father in *their* Names. Being *bound* in the *same Bond* with them \*; consenting to become their *Sponsor* and *Surety*, and obliging himself to pay their *double Debt*; a Debt of

\* His Name was put into the original Bond, in which we (*i. e.* the Elect) by the Law and Covenant of our Creation were bound. Mr Mathers's first Sermon at Pinner's Hall. pag. 18.

*Service* to the Law, as a Covenant of works, together with a Debt of *Satisfaction* to it, as a broken Covenant: in short, He and they *coalescing into one mystical Person* †. Such a Scheme of Justification I now disbelieve and renounce: and my dislike of it is increased, because it has done much harm to the *peace* of the Church; been the Subject of as angry intricate Disputes as almost any thing in Religion: is attended with several dangerous *Consequences* and *Absurdities*: Opens a Door to *Licentiousness*; and I don't see but upon the foot of it *Antinomianism* will be likely to subsist, and (as Archbishop Tillotson says) can never be fairly and solidly confuted. Very different therefore from the Justification above described, is, I am now well satisfied, the *true scriptural Doctrine* of this Matter: and which I take to be, God's *acquitting us from all contracted Guilt*, receiving us to his *forfeited favour*, and *treating, or dealing with us, as tho' we were perfectly Just and Righteous Persons*, for the *sake* of *Jesus Christ*, and in Consideration of his mediatory Performances, upon our *sincere, genuine Faith in his Name*, or an unfeigned *effectual Belief* of his Gospel and Religion. This God hath been pleased to ordain and make the *Condition* of our being so justified, and he *imputes*,  
Or

† The principal Foundation is, that Christ and the Church, or the Elect, in this Design were one *Mystical Person*, which state they do actually coalesce in thro' the uniting Efficacy of the Holy Spirit. He is the Head, and they are the Members of that one Person, as the Apostle declares, 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13. Hence, as what he did is imputed to them, as if done by them; so what they deserved upon the account of Sin was charged upon him. Dr Owen on Justification, pag. 246.



or reckons it to us accordingly, when fulfilled. The Imputation of *Faith* or Belief to Men, for the purposes of their Justification, (particularly that which hath for its Object Jesus Christ, and the Revelation of the Gospel) is both clearly taught, and strongly argued by St *Paul* in the fourth Chapter of his Epistle to the *Romans*. And that a Faith or Belief, which is available to these purposes, must be such as hath real and suitable *Effects* upon Persons, making them *live* as they *believe*; or that it must be a *vital Principle* in them, productive of *Christian Obedience*, is proved by St *James* in the second Chapter of his Epistle 14, &c. between whom and our Apostle, as there is, no question, an entire *Agreement*, (seeing they both wrote under Inspiration of the same Divine Spirit) so that is the *truest* Scheme of Justification, we may conclude, that *best* preserves this *Agreement*, and does it with the least strain and force upon Words, or the help of nice invented *scholastic Distinctions*; which, not the *former* but the *latter* Scheme will, I now plainly perceive.

Thus have I laid open to you, Sirs, with great Frankness, my present Sense and Opinion concerning several of the chief *Doctrinal* Points of Religion; the *ever blessed Trinity*; the *Person of Christ*; the *Decrees of God*; *Original Sin*; the *Extent of the Mediator's Undertaking*, and *Justification*. And from what I have told you, you'll easily collect, as I am willing you should, that I am now far from being a *Calvinist* (properly so called) as well as an *Athanasian*. I don't chuse  
indeed

indeed to go under any *Party Names* or *Denominations whatsoever*, but especially these. The distinguishing *Tenets* of *Athanasius* and *Mr Calvin*, I can no more espouse nor approve : And this, to say truth, is the Sum of what I had in my Design *so far* to declare.

But besides altering my Sentiments with respect to the several *doctrinal* Points before instanc'd, I am ready to own that I have likewise alter'd them about some others of a more *practical* Nature ; particularly, *Prayer to God*, and the *baptizing of Infants*. By the former I would be understood to mean, not *solitary and secret* Prayer, but what is *social and publick*. And as to such Prayer, I confess, I am so far from thinking it to be at all unlawful, or sinful, for Christians to practise the use of *Forms* in it, that their so doing appears to me now to be highly *expedient* and *fit*, provided the Forms are *duly composed*, or *well drawn up*. And praying in public by these is really *preferable* in my Esteem, to the common *extempore* Way, as being *attended with fewer Inconveniences*, and more *and greater Advantages*. I will venture therefore humbly to move for the introducing of a *Liturgy*, or *Liturgies*, amongst us ; and do heartily wish, every Congregation of Protestant Dissenters might be prevailed with, to let the Minister either frame himself, or collect from Books of Devotion, a *set of Prayers* suited as near as may be to *special Occasions* and *Emergencies*, along with common Cases and Wants ; and that this set of Prayers, after having been approved of by the Congregation, the Minister  
should

should be allowed stately to use (reading them from a Book, or rehearsing them from his Memory): with a liberty of adding to, leaving out from, or varying a Prayer, as he in his own Wisdom and Prudence shall see fit. Address to the Divine Being by Prayer, is certainly a *prime* part of our public Worship. The Decency, Solemnity and Profitableness of which I think scarce possible to be always secur'd, without *Forms* of Prayer, if not pen'd down, and got by heart, yet at least pre-meditated, or pre-conceived: However, 'tis a clear Case with me, that these can't be so *effectually* secured as by such Forms: And therefore I would seriously recommend them to others, at the same time I crave liberty to make use of them myself.

As to the Point of *Infant Baptism*, I have begun to doubt of late, I own, more than ever of *our* being in the Right. A very weighty, material Objection, now with me, urged against this is, the *utter silence* of Scripture in Relation to it, and that no single express Precept, nor clear Precedent for it is to be produced out of the whole New Testament. Or, if Infants were intended to be baptiz'd, 'tis questionable whether they were not *only such* Infants whose Parents became Profelytes to the Christian Religion from a state of Infidelity, not the Infants of Parents already *christianiz'd*. Besides, it seems most probable, that *Immersion*, or *Dipping the Body* under Water was the primitive Mode, and way of Baptizing in the Apostles Times. And the best reason I know off for altering this to sprinkling  
is,

is, that as the original word comprizes Sprinkling in the Signification of it ; so that is a Mode best calculated for all Climates and Countries, Places and Seasons, which Reason, whether it will hold, I am not fully satisfied. In short, I labour under too many Doubts in my own Mind at present, about baptizing Infants, in our Way, to continue to practise it as an Institution or Appointment of the Lord Christ ; and I must beg therefore to be excus'd herefrom, at least, till I am got over my Doubts about it, and it shall be farther and better clear'd up.

*These* then, Sirs, are all the Religious Points concerning which I propos'd to declare to you my Mind, and I have done it with the utmost Freedom, and great plainness of Speech, on purpose that you might be appriz'd wherein my Sentiments of them differ from what they were formerly, and how my Belief and Opinion about them at present stands. Not a *few* Debates (as 'tis easy to suppose) must have pass'd in my own Breast with regard to the *Expediency* and *Prudence* of such a Declaration, whether I had best make it at *all*, or make it *yet*. And truly if I had suffered *worldly Considerations* to sway and govern in this Affair, the Declaration had been wholly forborn, or however delayed. I have not been unthoughtful how this will probably *affect* me in my Ease, Quiet, Reputation, Character, and other Interests. 'Twill be no surprize, if the bigotted and uncharitable every where pour out upon me liberally, their usual Censures. I expect to be



be called *Arminian, Pelagian, Arian*, and the like opprobrious Names. And truly if these were the *only*, or the *worst* Consequences I had to be apprehensive off, they would not terrify, nor disturb me much. But possibly I may lose *Friendships*, here and elsewhere, that are highly *valu'd* by me, and the great *Pleasure* and *Comfort* of my Life. Perhaps I may henceforth be not so well esteem'd and beloved (as I have had the Happiness to have been) by *Brethren in the Ministry*. Yea, and there is ground to fear, throwing myself out of Favour in some measure, with my *nearest Relations* to the prejudice it may be of my outward Fortune all my Days. Why then (will it be obvious to ask) do you make any such Declaration, especially seeing 'tis a thing not *demand'd*, nor insisted on? I answer plainly: that a longer *Concealment* of my Religious Sentiments, and appearing and officiating amongst you as under *Disguise*, is a vast Burden to me, what I am not able to reconcile with the Notion I form of an *upright Character*, and the *Simplicity and Godly Sincerity* becoming a Minister of the Gospel. And as I have made the Declaration to discharge my Conscience, that I may not suffer Reproaches from thence for want of Integrity: So likewise to pave the Way, to *greater Usefulness*, if you see fit, and to capacitate me for a more *thorough* Fulfillment of *all* the ministerial Duties whereunto I am obliged. One of these (to my no small Uneasiness) I have been tempted intirely to omit,

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*viz.* Instructing and *Catechizing* your Children; from an apprehension, that if I undertook this, I could not well avoid teaching by the Catechism that is the Standard amongst us, I mean the *Assembly's*: which I don't scruple to own now I disapprove, both as unfit for Children, and built upon a wrong Heterodox Plan throughout. In another ministerial Duty, I acknowledge I greatly *fail*, thro' my not daring to be *free*, (especially with the generality of you) in Conversation upon *Books* and *Topics* of Religion, as I would chuse; and as indeed the chief End to be answer'd by a Minister's Visits, I think, requires. And even in *Preaching*, I find myself more and more *straiten'd and cramp'd*: so that *some* Subjects, upon which I would gladly insist, I have thought best altogether to *decline*, and several that I go upon, I am forc'd to treat with more reserve than I would wish, for fear of giving a Disgust and Offence. To remove these Difficulties in the way of my Duty, and put myself into a better Condition for the Discharge of it in every Branch, is the Aim then of the foregoing Declaration, and one *main* Reason why it is made. But I have also another Reason, that has determin'd me to draw up the said Declaration, and thus to offer it to you, which indeed is the *grand* Reason of all, namely, that herein I consult a *general Good*, and the *common Interest* of our dear Lord. I cannot help thinking that what I now do, is one of the best Things in *my* Power, (as for *your* spiritual Advantage and Improvement so)

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to serve the *Cause of Truth and Liberty*, to retrieve the *Honour* of the Gospel, and assist its *spread and success*. And was I to die and leave the World, it would be with more inward Satisfaction and Peace in my own Mind, I question not, upon account of my *having done* this, than if it had been left *undone*. These are Reasons which to me appear sufficient to justify the Declaration: And let the Consequences hereof be what they will as to myself, I hope patiently to submit to them, and to be enabled to bear them in the manner I ought. It may not be amiss to inform you before I conclude; that as this Declaration was drawn up without acquainting a *single* Person with it, nor was a Line of it shown, or read, to any Body, till I went to and talk'd with the Bookseller about publishing it; so it has been somewhat hasten'd by Intimations that I have receiv'd from Mr *Barker* within half a Year past, of his *Design* to quit *Hackney*, before it be long; not *wholly* it may be, but so far that the Pastoral Work and Care will devolve in *great measure* upon another: which my Conscience would not allow me to undertake without declaring myself beforehand in the manner I have done; supposing I should *be continued* with you: And in case I am necessitated to *withdraw*, I would rather do so whilst Mr *Barker* is upon the Spot, that you may not be left as *Sheep without a Shepherd*.

And now my Dear Christian Friends, humbly asking Pardon for all past Failings in the Duties of my Function, and earnestly recommending

you to God, and the Word of his Grace, as able to build you up, and to give you an Inheritance among all them that are sanctified.

I am, Sirs,

*Your very Affectionate Servant*

*Hackney, Nov. 16.*

1737.

P. G.

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P O S T S C R I P T.

AS I was first entred upon the Study of Divinity under *Calvinistical* Tutors, and for some Years read scarce any but *Calvinistical* Books, (being taught that these alone were *Orthodox*, and that looking into others might corrupt me, and endanger my *Soundness* in the Faith;) it is not to be wondred at that my preaching, all this while, should be accordingly. But in Process of Time, and as my Acquaintance with Men and Books increased, I began to doubt of the Truth of some of the Doctrines of *Calvinism*; particularly God's *reprobating* Persons absolutely, and of his mere Sovereign Pleasure, from everlasting, to their utter final Ruin †. And the

† Whether this is not Mr *Calvin's* Doctrine I leave to the Reader's Judgment, who is acquainted with *Latin*, and can understand the



the farther I searched into the *whole* Scheme,  
the

the following Passages, cited from the famous Book of his *Institutions*, p. 251. After having spoken of the Elect he goes on to speak of the Reprobate, and says: ‘ Nunc de *Reprobis*, quos simul illic (*Rom. ix. 13, &c.*) conjungit Apostolus. Ut enim Jacob, nihil dum bonis operibus promeritus, assumitur in gratiam: Sic Esau, nullo adhuc scelere inquinatus, odio habetur. Si ad opera convertimus oculos, injuriam irrogamus apostolo, quasi id ipsum quod nobis perspicuum est non viderit. Porro non vidisse convincitur, quando hoc nominatim urget, *quum nihil dum boni aut mali designassent*, alterum Electum, alterum rejectum, ut probet divinæ prædestinationis fundamentum in operibus non esse. Deinde ubi objectionem movet, num iniquus fit Deus, illud quod certissimum & apertissimum fuisset justitiæ ejus patrociniū, non usurpat, Deum rependisse Esau secundum suam malitiam: Sed diversa solutione contentus est, quod in hunc finem excitentur improbi ut Dei Gloria per illos illustretur. Demum subnectit clausulam, *Deum cujus vult misereri, & quem vult indurare*. Vides, ut in solum Dei arbitrium utrumque conferat? Ergo si non possumus rationem assignare cur suos [Electos] misericordia dignetur, nisi quoniam ita illi placet: neque etiam in *aliis reprobandis* aliud habebimus quam ejus voluntatem. Quum enim dicitur Deus vel indurare, vel misericordia prosequi, quem voluerit, eo admonentur homines nihil causæ querere extra ejus voluntatem, p. 252. Quos Deus præterit reprobatur; neque alia de causa nisi quod ab hæreditate quam filiis suis prædestinat, illos vult excludere. *Ibid.* Ubi Quæritur cur, ita fecerit Dominus respondendum est qui ita voluit.’ (And a great deal more to the same Purpose, which I forbear to cite.) A Translation of the two last of these Passages is given by Dr *Edwards*, in the following Words. ‘ Those whom God passes by, he is said to reprobate, and this for no other Cause, but that he will exclude them from the Inheritance which he predestines to his Children. — When it is asked why the Lord acts thus; the Answer must be, because he will,’ *Veritas Redux*, p. 164. And the Doctor who distinguishes the Decree of Reprobation into two Parts, *viz.* the Passing-by Part, and the Damnatory Part, does not scruple to acknowledge, that the *first* (and which he calls the *leading* Part, was *absolute, irrespective, unconditional*, founded on the *mere Will* of God, or the Result of Absolute Will, p. 154, 163. And even the *milder* Sort of Predestinarians he tells us, when they speak of the Eternal Sentence, or Decree of Damnation, make it Irrespective to any Sin except *Adam’s*, p. 164, 165. But there have been a more *Rigid* Sort (who thought they trod closest in *Calvin’s* Steps)

the more Reason I saw to suspect its *Orthodoxy*, and that it had no Foundation in the Word of God. Infomuch, that the Situation I was in at *London* grew more uneasy to me every Year; and if I had not happily been removed hither, (rather than have stay'd much longer where I was) I believe I should have quitted and left off the Ministry. A closer and more unprejudiced searching of the Scriptures since I came to *Hackney*, with better Helps and Assistances to understand them, has produced the *Change of Sentiments* that you'll find in the foregoing Letter; wherein, tho' I address immediately to my Christian Friends *Here*, yet I would be understood to write also to *You*. 'Tis not unlikely that some of you will be ready to entertain an ill Opinion of me for the said Change: But let me tell such, I can, and do, heartily bless God for it, as a Change from Darkness to Light, and

Steps) who placed the Decree of Damnation *before the Fall*, and made the Object of God's Reprobation, Man *simply Created*, vid. p. 166, 168. Upon which Account they have gained the Name of *Supralapsarians*. Shocking Divinity! I had almost said blasphemous, what more unworthy of God, or repugnant to his Goodness.

(Goodness in God) says Archbishop *Tillotson*, is a Propension and Disposition of the Divine Nature, to communicate Being and Happiness to his Creatures: But surely nothing can be more plainly contrary to a Disposition to make them happy, than an *absolute Decree* and peremptory Resolution to make them miserable. God is infinitely better than the best of Men, and yet none can possibly think *that* Man a good Man, who should absolutely resolve to disinheret and destroy his Children, without the Foresight and Consideration of any Fault to be committed by them. We may talk of the Goodness of God, but it is not an easy Matter to devise to say any thing worse than this of the Devil. Sermon on the Goodness of God, *Vol. II. p. 693.*

and from Antichristian Error to the Truth as it is in Jesus. I know how the Change was effected and brought about, by reading on *both Sides* of a Question, as every honest Man ought; and especially by such a Study of the *Bible* as was just now hinted: And I doubt not but it would be effected in you, could you be prevailed with to take the same, or like Methods; which therefore I now seriously and earnestly recommend. *Calvinism*, Sirs, (to speak my Mind of it to you freely and briefly) is a very wrong, bad Scheme; from whence all, who embrace it, will necessarily *suffer*, as I and you have done, in several respects: And indeed (excepting *Popery*) I know not of any thing that has more *Defaced* the *Beauty* of Christian Religion, or has a greater Tendency to *Defeat* its *blessed Designs*. You'll excuse a Freedom of Speech, I hope, meant for your Benefit; and in which I can assure you, I have no View to provoke, unless it be to a more thorough impartial Examination of Religious Matters. And however the Admonition thus publickly given you, may, very probably by some, be made light off, or treated with Sneer and Contempt, I desire you'll be pleas'd to carry in Remembrance that it has been given you, by one who sincerely wishes you well, and *shall be* always ready to serve you in your best Interests; who is sensible of his having misled you in his early Years, and not a little sorry for it, tho' it were only thro'

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thro' Ignorance ; and who can think of no  
better way, that He has in his Power, at  
this Distance of Time, to make you  
Amends.

P. GIBBS.

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